

## Sermon 2

**The Message of the Reformation:  
By Grace Alone, Through Faith Alone, Because of Christ Alone**

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Text: Romans 3:21–26 (ESV)

<sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— <sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. <sup>26</sup> It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

### Introduction

The chief concern for the Reformers may be summed up with the question, How can a person be right with God? This is the doctrinal issue of justification which Martin Luther regarded as “*the article by which the church stands and falls*.”<sup>3</sup> A thoroughly and succinct answer evolved in Reformation Theology:

**Today’s “take-home truth:” God justifies the guilty by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone.**

#### **I. God justifies the guilty . . . 22b—23**

- A. We are all guilty.
- B. God is angry because of our sin.
- C. Our sin is uglier than we can imagine.
  - 1. We deconstruct his design for us.
  - 2. We despise his holy name.
- D. Nothing we can do will satisfy God’s anger.

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<sup>3</sup> While no extant occurrence of these exact words exists in Luther’s writings, they certainly originated with Luther. Not only do they summarize his theological perspective well, but Balthasar Meisner described them as a “proverb of Luther” in 1615. See Philip J. Secker, ed., *The Sacred Scriptures and The Lutheran Confessions: Selected Writings of Arthur Carl Piepkorn*, vol. 2 (Mansfield, CT: CEC Press, 2007), 260.

E. And yet, God declares the guilty righteous!

**II. by grace alone . . . 24a**

A. God declares us righteous before him . . .

B. without any cost to us . . .

C. but solely because he is gracious.

**III. through faith alone . . . 22a, 25b**

A. Spurious faith attempts to use works as the root of justification.

B. Genuine faith always produces works as the fruit of justification.

**IV. because of Christ alone. 24b—25a**

A. In Christ, the debt of our guilt has been paid.

B. In Christ, God's anger has been satisfied.

Addendum: Why would God take such costly measures to justify such unworthy people? Paul makes it very clear: God does this to put his own character on display (cf. 21, 25b, 26); that is, God has done this for his own glory. We will explore this truth in Sermon 3, *The Purpose of the Reformation: Soli Deo Gloria*.

Conclusion:

This is “the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain (1 Corinthians 15:1-2).

To the non-Christian: believe it!

To the Christian:

Rejoice in it enthusiastically

Proclaim it zealously

Defend it vigorously